

Dear State Director:

I am writing to you today because our nation is in a race to prepare for a bird flu pandemic. In the words of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Michael Leavitt, "It is only a matter of time before we discover H5N1 [bird flu] in America...It does not mean that a pandemic is at our doorstep. It should, however, motivate us to pick up the pace, to renew pandemic preparations on every front at every level."

As we prepare for the emergence of bird flu in America, please make sure that your agency is part of the pandemic flu planning in your state. To date, pandemic planning summits have been held in more than 40 states, with six more planned between now and the end of May. All states, 7 territories, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia will receive a minimum of \$500,000 from the HHS to accelerate and intensify current planning efforts for the flu pandemic. I encourage you to work with the State Health Officer in your state and to make sure that adequate preparations are made to protect older adults and assure continued services in the event of a flu pandemic.

I also urge you to develop an agency pandemic flu plan within the context of your state's pandemic flu plan and to ask Area Agencies on Aging and all members of the local Aging Services Network in your state to prepare pandemic flu plans. The U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) has submitted a Pandemic Flu Plan to HHS that should serve as a model for your agency's pandemic flu plan. Please send your completed plan, including a description of how it fits into the overall state pandemic plan, to Brian.Lutz@aoa.hhs.gov. To enhance coordination and accelerate preparedness, we will post all State Agency on Aging plans on the AoA Web site.

Much helpful information is available on the federal government's pandemic flu Web site at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/> including the federal plan, HHS plans, plans by state and checklists. Please visit the AoA Web site for a copy of the AoA Pandemic Flu Plan at: <http://www.aoa.gov/press/preparedness/preparedness.asp>.

Thank you for joining us in helping the National Aging Services Network prepare for a bird flu pandemic.

Sincerely,

Josefina G. Carbonell
Assistant Secretary for Aging